

SERMON X.

BY THE REV. THOMAS WOODCOCK, A.M.

SOMETIME FELLOW OF JESUS-COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

HOW DOTH PRACTICAL GODLINESS BETTER RECTIFY THE JUDGMENT THAN DOUBTFUL DISPUTATIONS ?

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.—Romans xiv. 1.

THIS epistle to the Romans is an epitome or body of divinity, containing faith and love in Christ Jesus; from which Rome degenerating, hath separated from herself and the scriptures of truth, the only grand charter of all Christianity.

In the beginning of the epistle the apostle discourseth about original sin, as having infected the whole nature of man with its guilt and filth, both Jews and Gentiles, all become abominable, fallen "short of the glory" and image "of God." (Rom. iii. 23.) For "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. v. 12.) Whence he inferreth, there is no possibility of our justification by the works either of the ceremonial or moral law; so that he concludeth a necessity of our being "justified by faith without the works of the law," (chap. iii. 28,) "through the redemption of Christ Jesus." (Verse 24.) But though we are "justified freely by his grace," yet we are not to live freely and licentiously in sin because grace abounds: "God forbid;" (chap. vi. 1, 2;) for holiness is inseparably entailed on our "most holy faith." (Jude 20.) Then he proceedeth to show the privileges of the adopted children of God;—that "there is no condemnation" due "to them; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death;" and that they are "heirs of God;" (Rom. viii. 1, 2, 17;) which is more than all the world;—till he arriveth at the head-spring of all grace, and that is eternal election, (chap. ix.,) without any foresight of faith or works. But as in time he chose first the Jews, rejecting them he chose the Gentiles, without any view of merit or eligibility in either of them before others; for the Jews were the smallest and meanest of all nations, (Deut. vii. 7,) and the Gentiles all overrun with idolatry and profaneness. Yet this conversion of the Gentiles was foreknown and therefore forewilled of God "from the beginning." (Acts xv. 18.) After these sublimer doctrines, he descends (Rom. xii.) to practical duties; and he who will understand the first eleven chapters of the epistle to the Romans, must practise the last five: be acquainted with the mysterious duties of love, and then you will better understand the mysteries of faith.

In chapter xiii. 8, he exhorteth them to "owe nobody any thing but love:" be in nobody's debt, yet owe every one love; a debt always to be paying, and yet always owing, yet still abiding our proper treasure.

This fourteenth chapter is a branch of some particular duties of love, and this verse is the sum of this whole chapter of charity; which words are said to have occasioned the conversion or confirmation of Alipius, as the foregoing words were of Augustine's: such is the authority and energy of the naked word of God upon the consciences of men, in the day of Christ's power. And the naked sword cuts better than when it is sheathed in a gaudy scabbard of the "enticing words of man's wisdom." (1 Cor. ii. 4.)

The apostles were frequently exercised with difficulties, how to compose the differences among Christians; the Jewish converts were eager to bring their circumcision, with their observation of times and meats, along with them into Christianity. (Gal. iv. 10.) The Gentiles were not accustomed to these things, and therefore opposed them; yet were as ready to bring a tang of their own old errors with them also; as their "doctrine of demons," (1 Tim. iv. 1,) and their "worshipping of angels," (Col. ii. 18,) and probably some of their heathenish festivals and customs. So that both parties were in an error, and neither of them fully understood that liberty [which] Christ had brought to them from these "beggarly elements," rudiments, and ordinances to which they were "in bondage." (Gal. iv. 9.) For if God saw good to free his church from those ceremonies which were instituted by himself, he would never allow them to be in a slavish subjection to the superstitions and ceremonies of worldly men's inventions, though never so dogmatically and magisterially imposed. For, as learned Davenant, on that, Col. ii. 18, observes, such injunctions are apt to grow upon men; forbidding first not to "touch" or eat such and such meats, then not to "taste," after not so much as to "handle" them. (Col. ii. 21.)

Now, to compose these differences, the apostles met at Jerusalem; (Acts xv. 2;) where they made no positive injunctions for the Christians to practise any ceremonies or observations of either party against their consciences, but limited the exercise of their liberty which they truly had by the gospel; but [advised] that they should "abstain from fornication," (which to explain is too great a digression,) "blood, things strangled," and what was "offered to idols." (Verses 20, 23.) These they would have them to avoid, that they may not offend those weak Jews who could not suddenly concoct these practices, till judgment should be brought to victory over these feeble fancies. And they laid this also as a burden on them for a time, till they could be brought to better understanding; and all this by way of advice from the apostles, elders, and the whole church; (verse 22;) their letter also was read to the whole multitude. (Verses 23—30.) So here, the apostle adviseth the Romans how to do in the like case with these weak ones: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

1. *Here is the description of the person who is to be considered, ασθενουντα* ["weak"].

(1.) *Not him that is weak and sick to death, erring in the foundation of faith.*—One who doth "not hold the Head," (Col. ii. 19,) who "denieth the Lord that bought him;" these are destructive heresies which bring on men swift damnation. (2 Peter ii. 1.) We are not to say to such, "God speed you:" (2 John 10:) their very breath is blasting to men's minds.

(2.) *Nor is it one who is sick about "questions."* (1 Tim. i. 4.)—"Foolish," endless, "unlearned," unedifying "questions," which only engender contention. Such are idle "busy-bodies," seekers, and disputatious quarrellers about some minute things, which hypocritical and vain minds trade in, to keep themselves buzzing about the borders of religion, that they may keep off from the more serious duties, and substantial parts thereof. (1 Tim. v. 13; 2 Tim. ii. 23.)

(3.) *But he is one who is "weak in the faith;" who, though he hath embraced the doctrine of our Saviour, yet is not of a mature, concocted judgment, clear enough about the abolition of ceremonial observations, things [which] he judgeth ought to be forborne or done.*—Now let things be never so indifferent in the general definition or thesis, yet when they come to be used and exercised in their individual circumstances, they will be determinately good, or determinately evil, in all moral agents and actions. And that which in general seemeth indifferent to one is not so to another: these Gentiles could freely eat things strangled, but the Jews could not. Therefore it is a very strong weakness or wilfulness in some who love to turn straws into trees, and feathers into birds, and not to leave things as Christ hath left them, and as they are in their own nature; but will *transpeciate*,* as others *transubstantiate*, by their own breath, in their own opinions; and more fiercely contend for their own laws than the commands of God; as Saul was more severe on Jonathan for tasting honey, than on himself for rebelling against God's express command. These heats indicate a hectic fever to be in the body, preternaturally eating up and preying on the vital heat,—love to God and our neighbour: the zeal for men's own chimneys eateth up the house of God.

2. *Here is the injunction of charity toward weak ones.*—Προσλαμβανετε. "Take them to you, receive them into your houses," use hospitality toward them, supply their necessities; (Rom. xii. 13;) not "magnificent receptions," such as Levi gave our Saviour, *δοχην μεγαλην*. (Luke v. 29.) But when they fly for their religion and lives, supply their wants, though they be not just of your size or opinion. Do not force him to practise what he cannot freely do, to buy your charity: this is a dear purchase and a cruel sale. Generous hospitality is a duty of another fashion: receive them into your arms, into your bosoms, into your love and converse, that you may instruct them and win upon them; receive them into your society, into your communion; treat this weak brother with all humility, condescension, love, and kindness; yea, with all the warm graces Christianity hath

* "Divide into a needless number of species," "minutely specify."—EDIT.

endued you with. Let not these least differences cause the greatest distances, as often they do: if he hath so much candour as [that] he will be received, and be not sullen and angry, receive him; and by strength of love bear with him, and forbear him, till by love you soften and overcome him, by "heaping coals of fire upon his head." (Rom. xii. 20.) For if he be weak, yet seriously and sincerely a lover of Christ, and beloved of him, the Lord hath received him; (Rom. xiv. 3;) therefore do you also receive him.

3. *The limitation of this exception.*—*Μη εις διακρσεις διαλογισμων.* "Not to doubtful disputations." Some would render it "discerning of thoughts;" and there was such an extraordinary gift as "the discerning of spirits;" (1 Cor. xii. 10;) so there may be an ordinary prying into men's thoughts; and what is *ενθυμησεις* in Matthew ix. 4, is *διαλογισμοι* in Luke v. 22: "Jesus seeing their thoughts;" and thoughts are but "men's dialoguing and discoursing with themselves;" and so the sense is thus,—"Receive him, but not to the discerning or judging of his opinion or thoughts; or that he should be hardened to judge others' thoughts to be altered because they receive him." But *receiving* is receiving him into their society; therefore *not receiving him* must be not to something which was apt to be in their society and among them; which was, not the discretion of the strong, but their disputes, which were not fit for these weak ones. And the word most commonly signifies, "disputing with others:" "Paul disputed daily in the school of Tyrannus;" (Acts xix. 9;) and "the disciples disputed who among them should be greatest." (Mark ix. 34.) But in Jude 9 both words are met together: "Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses."

DOCTRINE.

Christians are to receive such as are weak in the faith into their hearts by love, and not to trouble or heat their heads with cramping disputes.

For practical piety will sooner rectify the judgment of the weak, than fierce argumentations. Lay aside this heat about ceremonies on all hands, and "attend to reading" and hearing the word, "and exhortation." (1 Tim. iv. 13.) Pray and praise God together, and converse in holy ordinances in love to each others' souls; let but this fire live upon the altar of your hearts, and then all other strange fire and heats will die away.

I will show you,

- I. *That weak Christians cannot well judge of arguments.*
- II. *That the practice of known duties is the way to get more light.*
- III. *That Christian love will sooner win others from error than rigid arguments.*

IV. *The inferences from all for instruction and direction.*

I. First, then: *Disputations and arguments are not easily judged of by such as are weak in faith and knowledge of Christian liberty.*—Now this is evident from the first dispute that ever was in the world.

For Satan was a disputer from the beginning; and is still the father and author of all ensnaring and contentious disputations. The first thing he disputed was God's command. The prohibition and threatening were absolute: מוֹת תָּמוּת *moth tamuth*, ["Thou shalt surely die."] (Gen. ii. 17.) But the woman, who "was first in the transgression," faltereth in the recital of it, with a פֶּן "Perhaps we shall die." (Gen. iii. 3.)

1. But by this first dispute with the serpent, our first parents [were foiled], when in uprightness and strength of the image of God, newly stamped on them in knowledge and holiness; yet this father or fomentor of disputes foiled them: and so all mankind, being naturally and federally in them, was drawn into their guilt and filth. So that reason is ever since debased and deposed, and no man is able to rule himself, much less another; his rule and measures being broken, he hath only some fragments and splinters of the tree of knowledge, which he darts against God and himself; the holy lamp and flame is so extinguished, that now he only "compasseth himself about with" his own "sparks" till he "lie down in sorrow." (Isai. i. 11.) Creatures, as creatures, are fallible and failable, (witness men and angels,) especially by the impulse of false arguments. It is God's only prerogative to be intrinsically infallible and immutable; and it is a perfection incommunicable to men or angels. But now sinful man is in a much more dark and doleful state. For,

(1.) *He cannot form an idea of any thing, nor frame a true notion of any thing as it is in itself.*—But he conceives by the aid of metaphors, similitudes, and phantasms. He cannot see into things themselves, nor their essences. He is hardly put to it to tell what dull matter or body is; much more what nimble forms, motion, or spirits are; or what his own soul is, though so nigh to him and part of himself. He is so in the dark, [that] he cannot define what light itself is. If any be so confident as to "think he knoweth any thing," our apostle tells him, "he knoweth nothing as he ought to know;" (1 Cor. viii. 2;) he is "not sufficient" as of himself for one good or true thought; (2 Cor. iii. 5;) which cuts the top sinew of Pelagianism, and the champions of the power of nature.

(2.) *His judgment therefore must needs be dubious or wrong whereby he is to compare things that differ or agree together.*—If God leave him or give him up to himself, "the prophet is a fool," and "the spiritual man is mad;" (Hosea ix. 7;) so as he will "put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; call good evil, and evil good." (Isai. v. 20.) Conscience, the soul's taster, and common sense are so vitiated and defiled, (Titus i. 15,) that he hath no true judgment or discretion, having not his "senses exercised to discern" between "good and evil." (Heb. v. 14.)

(3.) *His conclusions therefore must needs be distorted from these premisses; and the errors in the first and second concoction are not corrected and amended by the third.*—He who cannot make one straight step, can never take three together. All the errors and fallacies in the world are but the products of his ratiocinations; namely, "I can go

to the tavern or exchange, I find therefore I can repent and believe, when I will ;” whereas these are actions of another life and nature, which he was never born to, unless regenerated by the Spirit of God. To repent and believe are God’s gift, (Acts v. 31,) his work in us ; (John vi. 65 ; Eph. ii. 8 ;) though for this very doctrine “many of his” ignoranter “disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” (John vi. 66.) And so men jog on in their sensuality presumptuously, as if there was something in the pleasures of sin which was sweeter and dearer to them than God or heaven ; and [as if] when they have no more strength to serve their lusts, nor any thing else to do but to die, they can in one quarter of an hour make their peace with God : as one of that herd said to me ; who, soon after, drawing water out of his own well, and being drunk, was by the weight of the bucket drawn into the well and drowned. Another saith, “I may sin, because grace aboundeth.” (Rom. vi. 1.) This is a most disingenuous and unnatural argument : “I may hate God and my Saviour, because he hath so loved me ;” when holy Herbert said, “Let me not love thee, if I love thee not ;” love being stronger than death or hell in the hearts of God’s beloved ones. So, “‘Without holiness none shall see God ;’” (Heb. xii. 14 ;) therefore we must be justified by our evangelical obedience and righteousness ;” whereas this is only a concomitant for the cause ; for God pronounceth and declareth none to be righteous but such as are righteous. Now “there is none righteous, no, not one,” (Rom. iii. 10,) but in the righteousness of Christ, “who of God is made wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor. i. 30.) In sound Davenant’s words : “An alderman sits in the court, not because he is to come in his gown, but because he is an alderman by election,” &c.* So, “You must obey the laws of the church,” if that wedge will drive ; if not “the laws of the state ;” both which are inconsequent if they be not according to the law of God. The establishing [of] perverseness by a law (Psalm xciv. 20) made neither David’s nor Christ’s sufferings the worse, but *their* sin the greater *who* twisted such a law. So that we need a new logic from ‘Ο Λογος, “the eternal Word,” as a directory to our reasonings, as well as the common logic which teacheth us the regulation of the operations of our minds.

2. As we are lame in our feet by our naturals, so *even those who by the light of the gospel and grace are brought over to better understanding, yet by virtue of the old craziness they are not thoroughly illuminated and refined.*—The very apostles themselves were plainly told by our Saviour, that he should suffer death, and rise again the third day ; yet “they understood none of these things ;” (Luke xviii. 33, 34 ;) these sayings were hid from them until he “opened their understandings” to “understand the scriptures.” (Luke xxiv. 45.) We have all a dark side ; and Paul says, We “know” but “in part,” (1 Cor. xiii. 12,) we see but one side of the globe ; we cannot view things round about, they are above our hemisphere. These weak Jews were zealous for their ceremonies, as being instituted by God ; the Gentiles, as hot for theirs : let no man think himself infallible, for these were all out and

* DAVENANTIUS *De Justif.*

mistaken. Form, custom, and education, do wonderfully confirm men in error. How hardly were people in our first Reformation drawn from their prayers in Latin to English ! yet they understood not Latin : as hardly would they still be weaned from little formalities, though it were to entertain the most real and reasonable service in the world. So great a tyrant is tough custom over phlegmatic souls ; so apt are men to heats for trifles, by which straw and stubble they turn the church into a brick-kiln.

These Jews had divine right to plead, and the usage and practice of all the seed of the faithful, enough to stagger a weak Christian. Errors, fairly set off, may pass for truths ; and, if but weakly confuted, may hang a doubt in men's minds : so truths ill-guarded may go for errors. Objections not well-cleared had better never have been started ; for they may puzzle a weak head and heart, and make them both ache with fear of mistakes. A sophistical disputant will prove there is no motion ; the best way to confute him is, in our Saviour's words, " Rise up and walk," (John v. 8,) which is a real silent demonstration of it.

3. *Nothing so convulseth men's reason as interest.*—As Hobbes saith, " Though there is no problem in mathematics more demonstrable than that all straight lines drawn from the centre to the circumference are equal, yet if this did but cross any man's interest it would be disputed." Now in 1 John ii. 16, the apostle reduceth the whole world to those three elements, " the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life ; " a threefold cord, strong enough to pull any truth in pieces, as easily as Samson did his withes.

(1.) *The lust of the flesh*, modò hic sit benè.*—Pleasing the flesh goeth a great deal further than the monks' bellies, who yet have a lusty share in it ; as one of their own said, they had all things so complacent, that they wanted only a vicar † to go to hell for them when they should die. The bishop of Rome's kitchen and purgatory mutually support one another. Disorders of life hold up celibacy in men in orders. The lust of idleness inviteth to stage-plays, the nurseries of vanity and vice ; to cards and dice, in defiance of that canon which pronounceth them unlawful games. A lusty dinner makes the veins so strut, [that] they can leap or fly to heaven by their free-will, without the necessity of free-grace, so strong is flesh and blood without the Spirit of God. Surely he who hath an immortal soul within him, and a dubious state to himself as [to] that dreadful eternity before him, should never be sick of his time that lies upon his hand, one hour whereof millions of worlds cannot redeem.

(2.) *Covetousness is a weighty argument.*—Thousands are enough to break the loins of most men's minds, too heavy for the back of the strongest rationalist in the world ; the scale of judgment cannot turn while this beam is in the eye, nor any argument counterpoise this dead and deadly weight ; but " tithe of mint and cummin " will outweigh faith and the love of God. (Luke xi. 42.) " St. Bridget prophesied, the Roman clergy would ruin the church by their avarice ;

* " Provided this service be delightful."—EDIT.

† A substitute.—EDIT.

for she said, they had already reduced the Ten Commandments to two words, *Da pecuniam.*”* [“Give money.”]

(3.) *Pride of life swells men till they break all bonds and bounds.*—Like stum in the cask, [it] makes all the hoops fly off. The zeal of a party, and having declared for a way, make men [that] they cannot retreat; but will spur-on for honour and profit, though the angel of the Lord oppose them, till they are crushed to the wall. If Christian religion be founded in self-denial, mortification, and bearing the cross, they who seek their own glory are not of God: (John vii. 18 :) that is either no gospel, or these certainly are no disciples of Christ. We had need look to ourselves; for this lust of domination and glory, as Charron saith, “is the very shirt of the soul,—on from the first, but last put off.”

II. Secondly. I am to show you that *the practice of holy duties clearly commanded is the ready way to have our minds enlightened in the knowledge of principles.*—Reading the scriptures; discoursing about heaven, and about their souls’ everlasting welfare; reproofing one another, and admonishing; (Rom. xv. 14;) comforting and supporting the weak and dejected soul; (1 Thess. v. 14;) to exhort one another daily, “lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;” (Heb. iii. 13;)—duties so much out of fashion in these days, that it is not counted good manners or civility to practise them: friendly reproof is esteemed want of good-breeding. But are they not strange Christians who are strangers to scripture-duties?

1. *These practical duties performed would give us light.*—“He that doeth the truth cometh to the light,” (John iii. 21,) not only out of boldness, but [for] discovery of knowledge. Truth is nothing but goodness explained, and goodness is nothing but truth consolidated. Rudiments of knowledge are pre-requisite to practice, but examples clear all things to us. Demonstration by the compasses maketh the maxim evident. He that doeth best, knoweth best; for he seeth the actions as they are in themselves and circumstances. He doth *αναβαινειν κατω*, “he seeth the bottom by diving into them.” פתח פתח *Pethac pethaiim*: *The very entrance into the command giveth light*; (Psalm cxix. 130;) the door is a window to him that hath a weak sight: even those things [which] men have formerly ridiculed, practice hath reconciled them to be their Diana and great delight. As the Gnostic in Clemens Alexandrinus, who could not taste lewdness till he was “in all evil;” as it is, Prov. v. 14. If wicked practices darken the mind, (as all the works of darkness do,) then holy actions illuminate the soul.

2. *The exercise of holy duties advanceth light.*—Every step a man takes he goeth into a new horizon, and gets a further prospect into truth. Motion is promoted by motion, actions breed habits, habits fortify the powers, the new life grows stronger and fuller of spirit. The yoke of Christ is easier, smoother, and lighter, by often wearing it; this anoints us “with the oil of gladness,” and makes the ways of wisdom “pleasantness.” (Psalm xlv. 7; Prov. iii. 17.) Life and

* Fox’s “Acts and Monuments.”

light are nearly related: "The life was the light of men." (John i. 4.) These things Jesus first did, then taught; and so he "was mighty in deed and in word." (Acts i. 1; Luke xxiv. 19.) Very airing and motion heateth to a flame; this made his light burn and shine too. (Verse 32.) Truth incarnate in action, seems a lively resemblance of God in flesh; the unfolding a doubt to another hath often expounded and resolved it to the proponent.

3. *If any be in danger of error, or got into an ill way, keeping-up warm duties, meditation, and prayer will keep him in, or help him out.*—Communion with the saints is an admirable antidote against sin or error. As in a team of horses, if one lash out of the way, if the others hold their course, they will draw the former to the right path. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." (1 John ii. 20.) When there are antichrists and great apostasies, keeping to duty, like keeping the road, preserveth us from by-paths. I remember, a snowy night, when many wandering homeward were frozen to death, a shepherd, feeling himself foiled by often falling, set down his crook in one point and beat a path round, and so preserved his life, and kept him out of precipices and ditches. And we have a promise of light, if we "press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling." (Phil. iii. 14.) Carry the goal in your eye, and it will direct you a path where there is none upon a plain. Sincerely aim at God's glory, and your soul's salvation, and you shall not miss your way. If in any thing you should miss it, and "be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you." (Phil. iii. 15.) Yea, our great Lord and Master assureth us, "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John vii. 17.) But if men will make bold with God and conscience, and act for their own ends and glory, they rob God of his supremacy, and will lose both their way and their end. He that walketh uprightly hath God for his guard and guide; with devout Zachary, he is within the veil; and if he be in a mistake, God will reveal it to him: for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." (Psalm xxv. 14.) Go to thy oracle and pray, and a ray of heavenly light shall direct you, as the wise men's star, to the holy Jesus. Their minds are God's candles; (Prov. xx. 27;) and, as Father of lights, he will light them when they approach him with ardent supplication.

III. Thirdly. I am to show that *Christian charity and reception will sooner win weak ones to the truth than rigid arguments.*—For so the apostle adviseth them who were to deal with people weak in faith and strongly zealous for ceremonies: "Dispute not with them, but receive them first."

1. *In regard opposition breeds oppositions.*—A man will never believe that he loves his soul who cuts his purse, belies his actions, torments his body. Passion begets passion, but love only kindles love. When men do hotly dispute, they jumble for the way, and so one or both must needs leave the path of truth and peace. The saw

of contention reciprocated, with its keen teeth eateth up both truth and love; for such contentions are rather for victory than truth. Now passion doeth nothing well; which made one emperor say-over his alphabet, to get the dominion over his anger. Ahasuerus fanned himself in his garden; (Esther vii. 7;) and he in Plutarch would not smite his servant, because he was angry. Passionated persecution makes only hypocrites become proselytes; and in their breasts also lodge such a revenge as will be satisfied, one time or another, upon them who have made them offer violence to their consciences. Religion is a free choice upon judgment, or it is not religion; therefore it gets-in by persuasion, not persecution. Yet it is strangely true, they who are so tender of their own wills, that God must not touch them unless by argument, yet laxate themselves to club-law with their brethren, not content with a moral suasion.

2. *Loving converse taketh off those prejudices which hinder men's minds from a true knowledge of others' principles and practices.*—Which at a distance seem horrid and monstrous opinions and practices, whenas a little free course with them breedeth quite other apprehensions. The Papists picture the Protestants as brutes with tails, as devils with horns, to terrify the vulgar; but knowing merchants dare trust them. So some Protestants have represented the Puritans as pestilential and seditious persons, as mad and having a devil, as the scribes and Pharisees did John Baptist and Christ; but the plain-hearted people saw through those pious frauds and tricks, and were astonished at their doctrine and life, when they healed souls and bodies on the sabbath-day.

3. *Sincere love and converse breed a good opinion of persons who differ from us.*—They can taste humility, meekness, and kindness, better than the more speculative principles of religion. These get into men's affections, and so bore away into their judgments, and cause them to alter their minds. Two heads, like two globes, touch but in one point, the whole bodies [being] at a distance; but two hearts touch *in plano*, and fall-in with each other in all points. Love openeth the heart and ear to cooler consideration and second thoughts. The Spirit of God directed Elijah, not in the strong wind which rent rocks and mountains, nor in the earthquake, or fire, but in the silent whisper or tranquil voice. (1 Kings xix. 12.)

USE OF INSTRUCTION.

How to carry ourselves toward them who are weak in the faith, in these days.—And doubtless it is a sickly season when there are so many feverish heats among us. I will not say, what once a Romanist said to me, that these are the *spuria vitulina*, “the bastard friks” of our Reformation in Henry the Eighth's days; but I rather think the violent endeavours after *external* uniformity without the *inward*, the smothering of the industrious bees in one hive, was a great cause of their castling into several swarms. Threshing the corn hath driven it out of the floor; and the grasping so hard the grains, all into the hands and power of some, hath made them creep out through their

fingers. Rigid impositions, and violent prosecutions and exactions of conformity to things extra scriptural and [extra] divine institution, and without any manifest tendency to edification, have and will make fractions without end. As D. W. said, "Till men be infallible, and the world immutable, moderation becometh every man who is in his senses and considereth himself."

1. *There are some who have all faith, believe incredibly.*—As, That Catharina Senensis, praying for a new heart, she had her real heart cut out of her body, and after some days had a new heart, formed by Christ, put into her: That making a cross on the body with a finger driveth the devil away: That a priest by these words, "This is my body," transubstantiateth the bread into the body of Christ; and so he offereth that sacrifice to deliver souls out of prison, and then by his dirges conducteth them to paradise.

2. *Others have no faith at all.*—As that infallible one who said, "What vast wealth hath this fable of Christ acquired to the church!" so, when some had disputed about the immortality of the soul, most gravely determined in a verse,

Et redit in nihilum quod fuit ante nihil.

"That which is nothing must needs come to nothing." And I fear there are more atheists than Papists, who seem to believe all on the stage, nothing in their retiring thoughts. We are not bound to receive such into our bosoms or communion, lest we sting our own breasts; out of charity to our souls, we must take heed of receiving such.

3. *But there are others who seem seriously to believe the doctrine of the gospel, yet have a weakness in their judgments about little things.*—These we must receive, and instruct them, that "the kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. xiv. 17.) Show them all kindness, pity them, pray for them, and let them see nothing but your "order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." (Col. ii. 5.)

1. *Stand fast and fixed in the good word of God.*—Which "is settled for ever in heaven," (Psalm cxix. 89,) as the copy of the divine nature and law. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having-on the breastplate of righteousness." (Eph. vi. 14.) This is the grand and perfect rule of faith, worship, and life. Keep within these trenches, and you have an assurance of protection. I know no other method possible to peace, but in an universal resolution to impose nothing upon others but what Christ himself hath imposed, what scripture commands: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.) This is a minister-of-Christ's commission; and he cannot look for Christ to be with him, if he go either contrary to, beyond, or not according to, his instructions. Let this be first done, and then men may consider whether any thing further be necessary or convenient.

Let us therefore, in the name of God, beg his Holy Spirit, whom

Christ hath promised, and that "he shall lead us into all truth." (Psalm xxv. 5; John xvi. 13.) He is the only infallible interpreter of God's mind. "He shall receive of mine," says our Saviour, "and shall show it unto you." (John xvi. 14.) Then read the scriptures, as Christ himself did. "His custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read;" and when the book of God was delivered to him, he read Isaiah lxvi., a prophecy of himself; and so "he closed the book and gave it to the minister." Then he expounded and applied it to the present circumstances, that he came "to preach the gospel to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, give deliverance to the captives, open the eyes of the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." (Luke iv. 16—21.) O blessed pattern for every minister of Christ to follow! And sing the psalms or hymns, as we read he also did. (Matt. xxvi. 30.) And the ancient Christians, as Eusebius and Pliny also say, "used early to sing psalms and praises to Christ, administer the sacraments in the very words of Christ;" but guard the door that the grossly ignorant and profane may not come in. (1 Cor. v. 11.)

If any degenerate so as first and second admonition reclaim not, shut the door upon him, "let him be to you as an Heathen or a publican;" for so is the rule of Christ. (Matt. xviii. 17.) Every natural body, and civil body or society, hath a power to take in or cast out such as are for the benefit or damage of the community, to enfranchise or disfranchise when there is just cause. The church is Christ's body, and a society of visible saints. Most epistles to the churches in scripture were directed to the "saints" at Rome, (Rom. i. 7,) at Corinth, (1 Cor. i. 2,) and so on. Now, out of custom, carnal policy, flattery, or other ill motive, the whole world must come into the church; and the church, and the "world" which "lieth in wickedness," (1 John v. 19,) are one thing; then in cometh also the god of this world too: and will Christ have fellowship with devils? If swearers, drunkards, and unclean persons come in, it may be a market-house, or house for merchants, but not the Lord's house. (John ii. 16.) "A drunken saint, an unclean saint, a swearing saint," if they be not contradictions, yet they sound very harshly. No sin hath less temptation of gain or pleasure than swearing and cursing, and no sin more debaucheth the conscience, and strips it (even to atheism) of all reverence; and for men to have no more pity on them than to let them cram damnation down their throats, as soon as they have made the imprecation on themselves, is dreadful. I remember, an ear-witness told me he heard Dr. Hammond preach before king Charles I., at Oxford, when his affairs were at a low ebb; and he told him, while *God-damn-me* led the van, and *The-devil-confound-me* brought up the rear, he would be routed in all his designs. And *they* are very unlikely to be good subjects to princes *who* are open rebels to the laws of God, and men, and their own reason.

But let us keep to the rule: the principles of Christ's kingdom are rock and steel, not calculated for the soft meridians of this world, but can abide and stand in all times the same; they need not load the

secular arm to hold them up. Let us be faithful executors of our Lord's will, not law-makers or testament-makers; for "untempered mortar" will be always falling, and fouling them who daub it up. Let us "stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free;" (Gal. v. 1;) he and his truth only can make us free from all errors and mistakes. (John viii. 36.) "Let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus;" (Phil. ii. 5;) then nothing will be done out of contention or vain-glory; but God will make good his own promise,—all his shall have "one heart and one way." (Jer. xxxii. 39.) Then our Lord's prayer shall be answered: that all his may be one, as he and his Father are one: (John x. 30; xvii. 21;) one in the world,—that is impossible; but "let them be one in us, in our appointments, and then the world will 'believe that thou hast sent me;'" otherwise divisions will breed such temptations, as if Christianity was no reality. Now what can any man say against this method? Who are they that make divisions, but they that make more duties in religion and worship than Christ hath made? they who build upright on the foundations, or they who will jet over and drop upon their neighbours?

2. *As we should keep to our rule, so practise accordingly.*—Let the one foot of the compass keep the centre, and the other walk the rounds; let us live so as Minutius Felix says: *Non magna loquimur, sed vivimus*: "We do not talk great things, but live them." Exact walking would be as a miracle in this loose age, to confirm the faith we do profess. Catechise your children and servants as Abraham did, to walk in "the way of the Lord;" (Gen. xviii. 19;) so "most excellent Theophilus" was catechised and "instructed" in the things of Christ. (Luke i. 4.) Pray in your families: daily bread you have twice at least; then you are directed to daily prayer for it. If nations and kingdoms have God's wrath poured out upon them that call not on his name, (Psalm lxxix. 6,) then surely families much less can escape. We and our families need daily grace, daily pardon, as well as daily bread; therefore, unless we dare die in our sins, we should daily pray; for in God's hands is our breath, and his are all our ways; (Dan. v. 23;) who then dare breathe a day without compassing him about with prayer and praises?

And let us adorn our profession of godliness with honesty. (Titus ii. 10; 1 Tim. ii. 2.) Labour to think as near to the truth of things and actions as you can, and as they are in themselves; (Job xxvi. 3;) then speak and declare the thing as it is in your mind; (Joshua xiv. 7;) then do as you speak. (Psalm xv. 2.) *Ἀπλωσον σεαυτον*, "Simplify yourself," in Epictetus's phrase, "from all composition of frauds, policies, and hypocrisy;" then be sure you be just, and do as you would have others do to you,—the grand scale of righteousness. If men would but weigh their thoughts, words, and actions by this standard of equity, (Matt. vii. 12,) how would this make ministers, lawyers, physicians, and all others, take as much care of people's souls, bodies, and estates, as of their own! Then would come that golden age wherein they would have, if not so many dirty fees, yet

a cleaner and a greater reward of peace of conscience and joy in God.

Let us all be humble, meek, and patient, as our Lord; modest in apparel and all civil conversation, as those that resolve to walk in Christ as they have received him, (Col. ii. 6,) and to wear him as they have put him on. (Rom. xiii. 14; 1 Tim. ii. 9.) This primitive simplicity would revive charity, which is frozen to pieces in this cold age, this being "the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. xiii. 10.) All the commands of God must needs be broken, by the very want of it. When all is done, live so accurately, (Eph. v. 15,) as if you were to be justified by your works; and then, as unprofitable servants, cast yourselves wholly on free grace in Christ, (Luke xvii. 10,) lest, by the conceit of any merit, when you have anointed our Saviour's feet, you fling the box at his head, and rob him of his priestly office and crown.

As for disputing of controversies, let your discourses be rather in private, than before others; that you argue in love to the souls of your brethren, not for victory and triumphing over their infirmities. The Jewish rabbins say, "He deserveth hell-fire who putteth his brother to the blush." Therefore in meekness of wisdom argue with your weak brethren, that Christ was faithful in God's house or church, (Heb. iii. 2,) in commanding all things necessary for salvation, and the worshipping of God in spirit and truth; that Paul had declared to the Ephesians "all the counsel of God," and "kept back nothing that was profitable" to them; (Acts xx. 20, 27;) therefore we may safely venture in this bottom; and that those men *who* will venture to tender God a worship which he hath not commanded, *they* take upon them to be wiser than God, Jesus Christ, and his apostles, and can tell what will please God better than himself can. If, with Jeroboam, they will set up a worship of their own devising, to keep up his golden calves, (1 Kings xii. 33,) they must have very low thoughts of God; as if he was taken with our voluntary humility, in fancies and postures, rather than "the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Cor. xi. 3.) When he hath told us, the words his Father had given him he had given to his disciples, (John xvii. 8,) all other traditions may very safely be rejected.

Yet neither must we altogether abandon all disputations; (our Saviour indeed never called for a sword but to cut his way to a miracle;) but remit them to the schools or the press; (honest men may wear swords, and learn to use them, because robbers ride armed;) but let such take heed they dispute not with God, his providence or grace. I remember a disputation publicly in the schools, where the respondent in divinity defended this question, "That the term of a man's life was movable." He was presently seized with a fever and died. I say not, that providence determined the question. But if *all* times, much more *ours*, are in God's hands, (Acts i. 7,) not our own. (Eccles. viii. 8.) When Ames was invited to be professor at Franeker, Episcopius, then at Leyden, in his lectures in the schools, read against Ames; who, hearing of it, sent a bold

challenge,—that he would come to Leyden, and before the University answer Episcopius's arguments, and oppose his determinations, if he pleased. I know not why truth may not be as bold as error. But Episcopius wisely refused and declined it, knowing that Ames had a scholastical head; and close arguments would rout loose harangues,—his fist would be too hard for his palm. Those doctrines are borne up in the world by looseness of manners. They who are so much for free will, are for free life too. Never more of that doctrine, and never more licentiousness; which argueth some kindred and relation to be betwixt them. But, as D. H. hath said of old, "If Arminians be not the most godly, holy, heavenly, every way the best of men, they are the very worst, since they assert they have so much power to be good." Sir William Temple observes, where this opinion was born, it was looked upon as a mid-way betwixt Papists and Protestants, the blue to that bow-dye. But I am sure God's word says, He "works in us to will and to do;" (Phil. ii. 13;) and the tenth Article is expressly against this doctrine of free-will.

When free-will and wit have got the ascendant over true reason and conscience, Satan will ride post his last stage; for they will convert men into foxes and wolves, to deceive and devour each other; yea, into devils, to torment and insult over one another's miseries. And whoever above ground will build upon these self-centred globes, shall find their foundation will soon roll and slide from under them. When the earth was corrupt, then came the flood of waters. (Gen. vi. 13.) Christendom is so corrupted from true Christianity, that these giants in wickedness and violence presage a deluge of blood. But if "when the Son of man cometh" he shall find no "faith on the earth," (Luke xviii. 8,) then his coming is near. Then, come Lord Jesus, and put an end to all violence, fraud, and wickedness; and shut up hell in hell, hypocrites and devils in the same cloisters; (Matt. xxiv. 51;) and gather thy saints together to worship thee "in the beauty of holiness." (1 Chron. xvi. 29; Psalm xxix. 2; xcvi. 9.) Be thou "the desire" and delight "of all nations;" (Haggai ii. 7;) build thy own Jerusalem, (for men cannot or will not,) and appear in thy glory, (Psalm li. 18; cii. 16,) shine in it as "the perfection of beauty," (Psalm l. 2,) make it a "habitation of justice," and a "mountain of holiness," (Jer. xxxi. 23,) and "a city of truth;" (Zech. viii. 3;) that it may be said, *Jehovah-shamma*, "The Lord is there," and hath the third time whipped the traders out of his temple, and set it upon everlasting foundations; all administrations being according to his own measure, that golden rule, and "the pattern in the mount."